Hamilton Field, Base Commander's Quarters (Facility No. 299) 299 Casa Grande Real Novato Marin County California

HABS No. CA-2398-BP

HABS CAL 21-NOVA, 1BP-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey National Park Service Department of the Interior San Francisco, California

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

HABS CAL 21-NOVA, IBP-

HAMILTON FIELD Base Commander's Quarters (Facility No. 299)

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Location:

Hamilton Army Air Field

Novato, Marin County, California

Base Commander's Quarters (FOQ Type B) Facility No. 299 (299 Casa Grande Real)

U.S.G.S.: Novato, CA. Quadrangle (7.5' series), 1954 (revised 1980) Petaluma Point, CA. Quadrangle (7.5' series), 1959 (revised 1980) UTM Coordinates: Zone 10; A: 542100/4213620; B: 544720/4212220;

C: 542760/4210650; D: 541040/4212600

Present Owner: U. S. Navy, Washington, D.C.

Present Occupant: Military families

Present Use: Residential

Statement of Significance:

The base commander's residence, Field Officers' Quarters Type B, is the largest of the permanent housing units and is the only one of its type on the base. It was built in 1934 and has always been used to house the base commander. The quarters were equipped with all the modern amenities available at the time they were built and were architecturally unique in the military system. The building is significant as an example of the application of an important architectural trend (Spanish Colonial Revival) adapted to reflect California's mission heritage in a dramatic departure from traditional military architecture.

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398) for a comprehensive Statement of Significance and individual report HABS No. CA-2398-F for a condensed general Statement of Significance.

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PART I: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

- 1. Date of Erection: The Base Commander's Quarters was completed on November 28, 1934 at a cost of \$14,131.03 (Hamilton Facility Cards 1933-1971).
- 2. Architect: Hamilton Field was designed under the guidance of Captain Howard B. Nurse, Construction Quartermaster. He was assisted by a corps of civilians headed by H. P. Spencer, Chief Architect, and F. W. Salfinger, Chief Engineer. Captain F. C. Petes and Lieutenant J. H. Veal of the Quartermaster's Corps were detailed to Marin County by the War Department to assist Nurse (Novato Advance May 28, 1932). Landscaping efforts were directed by C. C. Stevens, a local landscape engineer, using plantings chosen by Nurse and donated by Marin County citizens.
- 3. Original Owner: Hamilton Field is on land originally owned by private individuals and companies. In 1930, the California Packing Company sold 630 acres of land to Marin County to use to entice the Army to build on the site. An additional 161 acres were purchased from Dr. T. Peter and Julia Bodkin. These parcels were combined with other County-owned land, and in 1932 Marin County sold a 927-acre parcel of land to the Department of the Army for \$1.00 for use by the Army Air Corps as an air field. In 1947 Hamilton Air Field was transferred to the newly-formed U. S. Air Force and renamed Hamilton Air Force Base. In 1974 the U. S. Congress declared the installation excess to military needs and closed the base (Maniery et al. 1993). The permanent housing area was transferred to the U. S. Navy in 1974 and remains in Navy ownership in 1995.
- 4. Builder, Contractor, Supplier: Construction of the Base Commander's Quarters was completed by Meyer Construction Company.
- 5. Original Plans and Construction: Original plans for all permanent housing were drawn on linen with black ink by Nurse's corps of architects. The originals have not been located, but copies of these plans for all permanent housing (elevations, electrical, plumbing, floor plans) are filed at the National Archives, Pacific Division in San Bruno, California, and can be accessed through the U. S. Navy. Original ink plans prepared for driveway and sidewalk paving and depicting site plans of the housing areas are filed at the National Archives. Facility cards for the permanent housing, including an original photograph taken at completion of construction and floor plans, are on file at the Hamilton Room, Novato History Museum, in Novato, CA. Early views of the permanent housing area under construction and at completion of work are contained in the Walt Lyons scrapbook at the Marin County Library, History Room, San Rafael, CA.

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6. Alterations/Additions: Most of the original steel sash or casement windows have been replaced with aluminum sliders. Kitchens were remodeled in 1955 and original cabinets, appliances, hardware, flooring, and lighting were replaced. In 1962 the tile countertops and backsplashes in the kitchen were removed and replaced with postformed plastic laminate. Kitchen floor coverings were replaced with vinyl asbestos tiles. A recessed light fixture was added over the sink at this time. Some interior fixtures in the remainder of the house have been removed and replaced with modern fixtures. The porch was enclosed in 1956.

B. Historical Context:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398) and Section B in report HABS No. CA-2398-F.

PART II: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The permanent housing area at Hamilton Field was planned around the existing topography to complement the architectural style chosen for the base. Nurse and his team of architects designed reinforced concrete buildings covered with white stucco and red tile roofs and other features such as arcades and ornamental door surrounds in a basic Spanish Colonial Revival style. This style was used by Captain Nurse at Randolph Field in Texas and by other Army architects at various bases (Fine and Remington 1972:48; Thomason and Associates 1993). Captain Nurse blended the standard Colonial Revival design with elements borrowed from Moorish, Spanish Churriguerresque, Mission, and Art Moderne styles, creating a unique Spanish Eclectic look.

All permanent housing is of hollow tile and stucco construction and has Mission tile roofs and reinforced concrete foundations. Steel bars were used during construction in consideration of the seismic activity of the region. Houses are all equipped with laundry and storage basements, attached garages, built-in closets and cabinets, and tiled bathrooms.

2. Condition of fabric: All of the permanent housing is in excellent condition. The U. S. Navy has maintained the exteriors and interiors of the structures since they took over ownership in the mid 1970s. Navy crews have regularly made repairs, painted as necessary, and conducted routine maintenance.

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B. Description of Exterior:

- 1. Overall dimensions: The Field Officers' Quarters Type B dwelling was constructed in an "H" plan, with a one-story central mass flanked by one- and two-story wings. The front elevation features a projecting front porch, arched living room windows, and a clipped corner on the northwest first story wall over two small arches windows. The building measures 72 feet wide by 58 feet 2 inches deep. It has a partially below grade basement.
- 2. Foundation: The foundation is reinforced concrete and measures two feet wide at the base and one foot wide above the basement floor.
- 3. Walls: Exterior walls are 12-inch hollow tile bricks. The tile bricks are coated with cementitious stucco rendered with a smooth face. Exterior detailing consists of arched windowheads, decorative arches above entryways, projecting cast concrete window sills, a crown molding cast concrete cornice at the second story roof level, and a cast concrete bullnose band course on the arched windows on the southwest corner.
- 4. Structural systems, framing: Structural support is provided by reinforced walls incorporating continuous reinforced concrete tie beams with wood-framed load-bearing interior walls. The roof system consists of terra cotta Mission tile laid on wood rafters.
- 5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: The primary entrance to the dwelling is accessed via a cast concrete porch with a 12-inch red quarry tile floor and decorative cast concrete molding above the entranceway. It has a wrought iron railing. An open porch, with concrete floor, is located on the south side of the building, above a garage. A concrete porch with exterior stairway provides access to the rear hallway on the south elevation. It has a Mission tile shed roof and wood posts. A concrete stoop with flat pilasters and a metal railing is featured on the rear of the home and leads from the enclosed sun porch to a flagstone patio that stretches between the two wings. Flagstone steps access the patio from the sides of the house.
- 6. Chimneys: A rectangular stucco-clad brick chimney is located on the interior rear living room wall, where it adjoins the enclosed porch. The chimney has a stepped, decorative cap with sets of recessed squares.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways/doors: The primary entrance door is accessed from the front porch; secondary doors are at the side and rear elevations. The primary door is solid core oak and has numerous deeply recessed panels in a geometric pattern, as well as a small window with grille. Secondary exterior doors are solid core wood with four lights originally made with wire plate glass over three recessed panels. French doors, with a transom, provide access to the exterior porch. The two

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garage doors are the overhead segmented type with one row of lights above two rows of three recessed panels. The original garage doors were more decorative and swung outward on hinges.

b. Windows/shutters: Original windows were screened multi-paned metal casement or double hung sash; replacement windows are metal and glass, with multi-lights. Front living room windows have arched brick windowheads with cast concrete bull nosed band courses; smaller arched windows provide light to a northwest corner coat room.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape/covering: The house has a hipped roof and cross-gable roof clad in terra cotta Mission tiles. The central mass has a gable roof, while the wings feature hipped roofs.
- b. Cornice/eaves: A decorative crown molding is located at the cornice level of the second story wing. There are copper gutters, downspouts, and scuppers. A cast concrete splash block is located under each downspout. The roofs have Mission tile ridges.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans:

- a. Basement: The basement is accessed by exterior garage doors and an interior stairway from the kitchen hallway. The floor plan consists of a double car garage, a laundry room, and heater room. An unexcavated crawl space is present under the front porch.
- b. First Floor: The primary access to the home is through a central hall, with a coat room, card room, bedroom and bath on the north side, a living room and enclosed sun porch in the central mass, and dining room, kitchen, pantry, and maid's room and bath on the south.
- c. Second Floor: Rooms on the second floor include three bedrooms and two baths; one of the bedrooms has a private bath.
- 2. Stairways: The FOQ Type B house is served by an interior stairway from the first floor hallway to the second floor and another from the kitchen area to the basement. The primary staircase consists of oak treads and risers with a turned oak newel post, oak banisters and balustrades. Basement stairways are wood, with two- by four-inch banisters, and non-skid treads.

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- 3. Flooring: Flooring in the hallways, living room, dining room, and bedrooms is red oak. The enclosed porch has a 12-inch-square red quarry tile floor. Flooring in the kitchen is Douglas fir covered with vinyl added after 1961. The kitchen and pantry floor originally was covered with linoleum. The basement and garage have concrete floors, smooth finished. Flooring in the bathrooms is one- by one-inch and one- by two-inch ceramic tile. All bathrooms have marble thresholds.
- 4. Wall/ceiling finish: All rooms on the first and second floors have painted plaster walls and ceilings. Basement walls are painted concrete or tile. Bathroom walls are partially covered with four-inch ceramic tile, with baseboards and trim in a contrasting color.

5. Openings:

- a. Doorways/doors: An archway provides access from the central hallway to the living room. French doors are located between the living and dining room. Two sets of louvered French doors access the enclosed porch from the living room. All other doors are solid core wood with two recessed plywood panels.
- 6. Decorative features/trim: The living room has a "Tray" ceiling. Door casings and baseboards are wood and simple in design. Picture molding is located at the cornice level in the living room, dining room, hallways, and bedrooms. The living room features a fireplace constructed of cast concrete with a chimney breast and mantel supported by pilasters. The hearth has six-inch-square red quarry tile.
- 7. Hardware: The door hardware consists of a nickel-plated decorative circular knob and escutcheon made by Corbin Company. The front door and French doors have hammered metal thumblatch handles. The built-in cabinets in all rooms but the kitchen and pantry have porcelain or glass knobs. Hardware in the bathrooms is chrome-plated and standard in design. Doors have half-mortise hinges. Metal "Dixie" brand bells connected to the electric front doorbell are located in the kitchen.

8. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: Steam radiators are located in each room and provide heating. They were made by American Radiator or Crane Radiator companies. Steam is generated by cast iron boilers located in the basement made by Ideal Gas Boiler Company. The boiler has a valve made in Germany in the early 1930s that is stamped with a swastika.
- b. Kitchen Appliances: No original kitchen appliances were noted.
- c. Ventilation: The basement is vented by terra cotta Mission tiles.

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- d. Lighting: The house has knob and tube wiring with a circuit breaker box. The original lighting in the first floor hallways consists of a hanging wrought iron circular fixture with a canopy and chain. Lighting in the living rooms included two sconces with candle lights and consisted of a shield decorated with a knight and castle. Dining room lighting included a wrought iron "Monterey" style fixture with five arms with candle lights, and four triangular shaped wrought iron wall sconces with candle lights. Porch light fixtures were eight-sided wrought iron sconces with rooster finials and eight-sided frosted glass. Hallway lighting consisted of a castmetal canopy with six points. Bedroom fixtures consist of wall sconces with candle lights on arms and surface mounted canopies with pointed pan glass. Fixtures in the maids' rooms were decorative cast metal with double sockets and candle lights. Original bathroom lights were ceramic wall sconces, flanking the medicine cabinets, and operated by pull chains. Not all lighting fixtures are extant in every unit.
- e. Plumbing: A "Alberene Stone Eagle Guaranteed" double wash sink is located in the basement. The maid's bathroom on the first floor contains a "Welling" flush valve toilet, a wall-mounted sink, and an enameled cast iron tub. Bathrooms on the second floor feature "Tepeco" pedestal sinks (Trenton Pottery Co.), "Standard" flush valve toilets, "Crane" tubs with porcelain fixtures, and the original ceramic toothbrush and glass holders, soap dishes, toilet paper holders, and plastic-covered wood towel racks. The original mirrored metal medicine cabinets are located above the sinks.
- 9. Original Furnishings: The pantry features solid-core wooden cabinets and doors with recessed panels. A built-in pull-down "Berklee" ironing board, with two recessed wood panel doors, is located in the kitchens. Kitchen cabinets are painted wood replacements and were added in 1955, replacing the original recessed panel cabinets. The kitchen originally had tile counters and backsplashes; these have been replaced with formica tops. There is a recessed telephone niche in the downstairs hallway. There are two arched, recessed book cases in the living room, built-in linen closets near bathrooms, and cabinets in the dressing room with drawers and shelves.

D. Site:

- 1. General site orientation: The primary facade of the Field Officers' Quarters Type B faces westerly towards Casa Grande Real and an arm of San Pablo Bay. Located in the original Spanish Colonial Revival district of Hamilton Army Air Field on the crest of a rolling hill, and surrounded by water on two sides, the quarters are at the head of a row of other Field Officers' Quarters, of a slightly less elaborate design. Of note is the rock terracing in the yard.
- 2. Historic landscape design: Captain Nurse's overall plan for base design included thoughtful use of rock walls, terracing, and plantings to create a visual effect that was

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continued, in a more limited fashion, during World War II. Rock terracing throughout the original base served to simultaneously separate individual residences while visually uniting various sections of the base into an overall city-like plan. They were built as part of the final phase of original post construction in 1935 (Hamilton Official Photographs 1934-1935). Foundation and accent plantings, tree-lined streets, and retention of natural oak groves and rolling hills complement the rock work.

In the housing areas the homes sit in well-landscaped grounds with lawns, mature oak and palm trees, shrubs, and flowers. Upright accent trees frame the doors and corners of many buildings. There are no fences; each yard flows into the next and the plantings, stone retaining walls, street light standards, and curved roads lined with palms and other trees provide a cohesive feel to the area. Concrete sidewalks provide separation from the curving streets and connect the houses. The diversity, density, and uniqueness of landscape plantings increased according to military rank of individuals living in the houses; thus landscaping in the NCO area is primarily functional, while that of the base commander is dense and heavily wooded, providing more privacy.

Landscaping in the Field Officers' housing area include barrier, foundation, accent, and street plantings. More care went into the landscaping of these high-ranking officers' houses than anywhere else on base. At least three-quarters of all plants used on base were planted in these areas, and probably 95 percent of the total planting diversity is represented on these streets. These areas are heavily wooded and many large oaks remain among the houses and in the yards between the houses.

Barrier plantings create an illusory separation between houses in lieu of fences. The areas between the houses here are heavily planted both with tree species and with shrubs functioning as an understory, increasing the feeling of privacy. Nurse used a variety of cedar species, northern California black walnut, several species of fan palms, coast redwood, bunya bunya, Canary Island pine, and California bigtree for trees. Shrubs are interspersed within these barrier trees and include Catalina cherry, red clusterberry, windmill palm, loquat, pampas grass, Japanese boxwood, hawthorn, privet, myrtle, and English laurel. Of primary interest in this area is the retention of some native California plants in the oak woodland understory. Toyon and buckeye are still present and form parts of the barrier vegetation between houses.

Foundation plantings were originally designed to hide foundations and tend to soften the transition between the ground and the buildings. These are fundamental design plants and a wide variety were used for this purpose, including Japanese boxwoods, California privet, myrtle, little-leafed myrtle, mock orange, laurel cherry, red clusterberry, and shiny-leaf privet. Heath melaleuca, brush-cherry pittosporum, and camellia were also sued as foundation plants in the Field Officers' area, but not in other housing areas on base. During the primary occupation at Hamilton these shrubs were

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kept pruned and boxed-shaped, reflecting the preferred look of the day. Most of these plantings have become quite large and overgrown and appear as accent plants.

Accent plants serve to set off entranceways, driveway corners, highlight a building front, or provide individuality. Nurse planned these plants as upright accents to contrast with the foundation plantings. New Zealand dracaena was used extensively for this purpose, but is jointed by Italian cypress, Oriental arborvitae, windmill palm, and Japanese cryptomeria. Traffic circles and triangles are planted with large coniferous trees and palms. Bunya bunya are used as strong accent trees in entrance triangle or traffic circles. In addition to the plantings around the Field Officers' housing, the trees in the field officers' area include Canary Island date palm, bottle tree, northern California black walnut, and catalpa.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398).

B. Historic Maps and Views:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398).

C. Interviews:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398).

D. Bibliography:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398).

Sources cited in this individual report are listed below.

Fine, Jesse, and Lenore Remington

1972 Army Corps of Engineers: Construction in the U.S. U.S. Army and World War II, Office of Military History.

Hamilton Facility Cards

1933-1971 Maintenance Cards for Base Facilities. On file, Hamilton Army Air Field Installation Office, Novato, and Hamilton Room, Novato History Museum, Novato.

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Maniery, Mary L., Leslie R. Fryman, and Fred Hrusa

1993 National Register of Historic Places Evaluation, Hamilton Army Air Field Historic District, Marin County, California. Submitted to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Sacramento District.

Thomason and Associates

1993 Randolph Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas. Cultural Resource Survey, Final Report. Nashville, Tennessee. On file, State Office of Historic Preservation, Austin, Texas.

E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398).

F. Supplemental Material:

Copies of representative floor plans of Facility No. 299, dated in the 1930s and prepared by the Quartermaster's General Office are attached to this form.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Hamilton Army Air Field is owned by various federal entities including the Department of the Navy, Department of the Army, United States Coast Guard, and General Services Administration. The Army/GSA parcels are being excessed and sold to private developers. The Navy property is included in Base Closure and Realignment actions.

As part of the Army's undertaking, it has been determined in consultation with the California Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) that the excess sale will have an affect on properties at the air field, and that these properties are components of a district that is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Based on consultation with the OHP and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, pursuant to 36 CFR part 800, regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470f), a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was entered into by the interested parties in March 1994. The agreement stipulated that prior to excess sale the Army must contact the HABS/HAER division at the Western Regional Office of the National Park Service, San Francisco, California, to determine the appropriate level and kind of recordation for the subject properties. The MOA further stipulated that copies of the documentation be made available to the OHP and appropriate local archives designated by the OHP. This recordation has been prepared in order to meet those stipulations.

The title page, Part I, and Part III were prepared by Mary L. Maniery, Historian, PAR Environmental Services, Sacramento. Architectural descriptions in Part II were compiled by

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Judith Marvin, Historian/Architectural Historian, Foothill Resources, Murphys, California. Descriptions were checked against photographs and plans by Mary L. Maniery and were embellished and corrected, as necessary. Information on historic landscape design was extracted by Mary L. Maniery from a report prepared by Dr. Fred Hrusa, Botanist, PAR Environmental Services. Photography was prepared by David DeVries, Mesa Technical, Berkeley, California.

